

# Self-Constructive Obsession in Philip Roth's *The Portnoy's Complaint*

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**Abstract**—Everyone familiar with the Freudian and overall psychoanalytical terminology somehow finds a very close link between the words "obsession" and "psychosis", the words which, in turn become associated with sexuality. Over the years every living organism tries to acquire a means for survival. Most of the times, survival equals the prevalence of the species over its peers. Desires unfortunately or not overshadow everything that coincides with life, economic and political power, respect of peers, siblings, mates and even children largely depends on how well you are doing in your sexual life. In *The Portnoy's Complaint* we find the author, Philip Roth, give an unadulterated voice to the suppressed sexuality of a teenager, Portnoy. By taking us methodically and unaffectedly through every stage of his physical and sexual development, Roth manages to capture a picture of human life which, in the showy and affected modern life style which so many of us seem to lead, goes unnoticed. In this study, using mainly the psychoanalytical views of Jacques Lacan, sexuality regardless of its moral issues, is an important factor in shaping the young adult's personality.

**Keywords**— Lacan, obsession, psychoanalysis, Self-construction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*The Portnoy's Complaint* was first published in 1969. It is an American novel narrating the throes of being a Jewish-American boy. Because of its sexual themes and playful approach too many social and religious themes since the time of its publication it has triggered a flood of criticism and praise among critics and readers alike. It cracks down on Radical religious views within the Jewish communities in America. The novel, adopting a comic tone and narrated mostly from the point of view of a teenager careless of the social norm and deep-rooted sociopolitical ideologies, narrates the experiences of "a lust-ridden, mother-addicted young Jewish bachelor," who confesses to his psychoanalyst in "intimate, shameful detail, and coarse, abusive language." Many of its characteristics went on to become Roth trademarks. [1]

Stylistically *The Portnoy's Complaint* is quite unique. It adopts the old-fashioned first-person viewpoint and goes on to mix it with a modernist psychic morality. The result is an autobiography imbued with the invaluable material

which portrays the psychic as well as social map of an Avant-garde nineteenth century Jewish American teenager. The novel is a cathartic experience for the protagonist which helps him to better understand his place in the universe. Alexander Portnoy talks to his therapist and by engaging himself in long and deep conversations with him in hopes he aspires for a cure for his adulthood apprehension.

The novel's psychological format is mostly revealed through the monologue which he keeps going throughout the novel. Portnoy addresses his "doctor" in the first person time and again and by doing so he reveals the underlying monologue which acts as the framework of the novel. The author's knowledge of psychoanalytic concepts is remarkable and it is revealed through the meticulous psychoanalytical process and well-informed views which propel the narrative line forward. As Jeffrey Berman states: "When a Philip Roth character finds himself lying on a couch, more than likely he is engaged not in sex but in psychoanalysis. Therapy becomes the most intimate and imaginative event in life for the beleaguered hero, the one love affair he cannot live without". [1] Always impersonating and never the real thing. Because he was tall, that made him Lincoln? Because he spouted "the masses, the masses, "that made him revolutionary? He wasn't a revolutionary, he wasn't a Lincoln, and he wasn't anything. He wasn't a man – he impersonates being a man along with everything else. [2]

The earliest readers of Roth's work, 1959-1975, were criticized for their abhorrent obscenity and at times misogynistic mannerisms he gave to his characters. Roth also can be shown as a neurotic case which constantly brings forth his psychological conflicts to the fore front of his writing. Roth was a product of the New York City life as such it is natural to him to spouse ideas which portray the inner socio-political problems of the city. As Leslie Fiedler, in a 1959 essay claimed: "For Newark...to exist for the imagination of strangers... [it] would have to produce a writer as vulgar, comical, subtle, pathetic and dirty as itself". [3]

In this vein Portnoy presents a perfect example of a modern man living through the hustle and bustle of such a city life. His life becomes even more problematic when we take into account the fact that he has been raised in

New York as in a Jewish family with their own peculiarities of life and religious beliefs. As such Mitchell Morse considers Portnoy "the Neurotic Jewish Liberal Intellectual who is nothing but The Neurotic Jewish Liberal Intellectual". [4]

It's not the first time that Portnoy is being scrutinized psychoanalytically. Mark Shechner dubbed *The Portnoy's Complaint* a "Freudian fiction". [5] Alex Portnoy, he maintained, although rebelliously transgressing the taboos of eating pudding and shiksah, fights for his manhood at the kitchen table battle site and ultimately loses. [5]

## II. MATERIALS

The novel *The Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth is the building block upon which this essay has been grounded. Writing the *Portnoy's Complaint* Roth has exposed himself to the possibility of being portrayed as a model of the Jewish youth growing up in America. So it's no surprise that some readers' reaction focused on Roth as a legitimate representative of American Jewish literature. Nevertheless, Roth was already considered a Jewish writer by the time he penned down Portnoy. Critics such as Asher Z. Milbauer and Donald G. Watson, Hana Wirth Neshet, Martin Tucker, Estelle Gershgoren Novak, Jonathan Brent, Daniel Walden and Debra Shostak, S. Lillian Kremer analyzed conceptions such as identity, anxiety, emotional displacement which Roth, as someone who has been a witness through the Holocaust and Jewish history. Being Jewish he has also never been far from the ideas of homelessness and estrangement.

The novel has been analyzed through a reference to psychoanalytic methods and materials. Jeffrey Berman was among the first critics who in a 1985 volume, *The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis* which invited a psychoanalytical reading of Roth's work which, at the time was quite unprecedented for readers of Roth. Peter L. Rudnytsky, also a critic, was among the first which adhered himself to this new wave. Rudnytsky and Berman basically view literary narratives bound, in a very close relationship, to psychoanalytical readings of the neurotic patients. It is this relationship which we focus on in this reading. The traumas of being a lone individual with artistic inclinations in a dogmatic home-environment with limited chances of finding a proper outlet for his ambitions is what is hidden within the inner layers of Roth's literary creations. The psychoanalytical approaches to literature are various and varied so, in this essay; we will focus on Jacques Lacan's unique ideas on human psychological development. And from his ideas we try to analyze *The Portnoy's Complaint's* psychoanalytical framework on different layers.

Berman explains, Roth's "psychoanalysts seem frozen in time, imprisoned by a rigid Freudian ideology that most

analysts have long ago abandoned or sharply revised" [1]. According to Mark Shechner, *My Life was Roth's* way of "having art take up where therapy had left off, and to do what therapy had failed to do: produce usable fictions" [5]. Tarnopol in "My True Story" proposes various explanations for his catastrophic marriage. Authors like Berman with their unique perspective on Roth and his works have been the inspiration for coming up with the ideas which have been painstakingly developed throughout this essay.

## A Psychoanalytic Case

Berman being one of the prominent critics adopting a psychoanalytical approach to the book has, in the choicest of words, described the *Portnoy's Complaint* as a "psychoanalytical monologue" [1].

Philip Roth in it in an opening line of the novels presents the reader with a tangible picture of the social milieu of the time, that is the sixties' New York, "much that had previously been considered [...] to be disgraceful and disgusting forced itself upon the national consciousness, loathsome or not; what was assumed to be beyond reproach became the target of blasphemous assault; what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things, yielded and collapsed overnight" [6].

Lacan, a prominent twentieth century French psychoanalyst, was among the first who shifted the emphasis on a verbal registry of psychological development to an emphasis on the symbolic register. He comes to this understanding in the final stages of his significant studies. He meticulously observed [6] the way a signifier represents the subject for another signifier. In Lacanian psychoanalysis a subject learns and comes to terms with his environment through analysis and in transference. This is the case for Portnoy who has to since the very beginning stages of his life face a devastating and psychologically taxing oppression. This oppression occurs to Portnoy on a domestic as well as social level. In the domestic terrain Portnoy, being first and foremost a Jew has to deal with the downsides of it "A Jewish man with parents alive is a fifteen-year-old boy, and will remain a fifteen-year-old boy till they die!" [7]

As Lacan [8] puts it, The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject's disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse.

Lacanian occupation is conversant by principles of psychoanalysis that is the morality, dutiful behavior or gradually contextualization which happens with other psychoanalytical theories. No matter what a critic may do he has to be always ready to be charged with dogmatism. Lacanian psychoanalysis is not an exception. It has always been accused of complicating the basic ideas and

theories not quite unlike what Freudian theories were subject to blame at the peak of their popularity. Lacan's work mainly hovers around the factors which lead to the 'alienation' of the subject. This alienation is preserved and transformed in our separation from those who are considered to be the other to us. This "Other" in Roth's contemporary environment can be translated into his separation from his Jewish community, of which he is seemingly a part, and an apathetic hidden loathing for the American society and politics. This alienation of which the protagonist, Portnoy, as the signifier in the symbolic milieu of the book goes through, can be mapped into quite distinct forms of exploitation, on his parent's side, and the exploitative nature of the capitalist society of New York, where he was born and raised and calls home. In Lacan's view there is a 'lack' in the subject which is a direct result of his alienation from his society. As Lacan perceives the alienation and separation occurs at the level of personal subjectivity. Portnoy being the repressed lone individual, who strives to defy his social and religious dogmatism, is the conscientious subject who strives to find an answer to how that "individual" aspect of subjectivity comes to assume importance under capitalism and how individuals attempt to fill in that lack with different ideological contents such that ideology itself comes to work as the process of filling in with these contents rather than being defined with reference to the stuffing itself". [8]

Portnoy describing his experiences to his therapist talks about reading great works of literature as a child. While detailing his familiarity with these works, he seems a quite at loss on how to connect with his ideal heroes in those novels. When he tries to think in a logical way to his state of life he realizes that life after all is not what it appears to be. He feels betrayed by the misinformation given to him by the society. The version of reality given him by the capitalistic society is not going to be the blueprint he needs to form his own identity as a teenager: "My model of reality, deduced from reading the masters, had at its heart intractability ... instead of the intractability of serious fiction I got the difficult marriage because that was what the gender politics of the 1950s encouraged: you became a man in the 1950s by taking on responsibility, such as early marriage" [7]

The novel's title, Portnoy's Complaint, describes the entire text of the novel. Portnoy is quite simply disturbed. He manifests an egotistic personality and behaves quite disrespectful toward women. His hate for "the other" does not involve only women. He deflects his hatred masochistically toward himself.

Psychoanalysis is not about simplifying things and yet it is not concerned with complicating the matters. In its best it must be concerned with figuring out the issues with a balanced and workable framework which abides by

certain principles. One of the core concerns of psychoanalysis and the subject where the analysis spends most of its energy is the field of language. It is not a surprise because after all most of the abstract interaction that a human being makes with his environment happens through language. In other words, the man who is born into existence deals first with language; this is a given. He is even caught in it before his birth. It is obvious that such a form of contact is not absent in man. Man since the very beginning stages of his life tries to make a conscious effort to communicate with the world around him through symbols. Man is obsessed with the world of symbols but this obsession does not "necessarily mean sexual obsession, not even obsession for this or for that in particular; to be an obsessional means to find oneself caught in a mechanism, in a trap increasingly demanding and endless." [8]

In the Portnoy's complaint this obsessive tendency manifests itself in various ways. Alex Portnoy's monologue to his psychiatrist is his "complaint." He's recounting every unpleasant, embarrassing, bizarre, sad thing that's ever happened to him. All of it, by his estimation, is because of his Jewish upbringing and the resulting guilt that has plagued him during his entire life.

### Portnoy as the Oppressed

To a casual reader of literature the significance of Portnoy's innocent description of his life may not be entertaining enough but one has only to overlook the casual fun he has while reading a work of fiction try to delve more deeply into the anterior layer of the novel. Lack of pretention and breaking the stereotypical trends that would make him an ordinary hero are enough to give the novel a postmodernist hue but when we factor in the identity crisis on a personal and communal level the matters become much more complicated. Vulgarity in its own right, rather than a sign of incompetence on the part of the writer, Portnoy wasn't Roth's first novel and many readers already knew him, adds an edge to the narrative's straightforward storyline. The language which he uses may seem "obscene and vulgar but when looked upon as of intimate, shameful detail, and coarse, abusive language that...in another fictional environment would have struck me as pornographic, exhibitionistic and nothing but obscene". [9]

Psychoanalysis uses different tactics and methods in order to cope with the often complicated problems of the human psyche. The most common technique which used to be very popular in the late twentieth century was the 'talking cure' method in which, left alone in a room with only a contemplating analyzer, one pours their memories out the way they occur to him in his mind. The process may seem random and unhelpful but, because the patient

in these sessions happens to be very honest about his feelings, it sometimes happens that he touches upon a subject which may very be the cause of their anxieties and psychotic issues.

Portnoy is a picture of the American life. As Roth himself portends "an attempt to imagine a book about imagining that American myth" [6].

He has done the same with the American Pastoral in which Nathan Zuckerman, attempts to imagine the sixties, the "decade of disorder, upheaval, assassination, and war" [10] Portnoy is the expression of a specific group of people who go through certain incidents which occur to the general public of America in a specific period of time when everything goes through definitive changes. The pain he suffers is a particular one which has incapacitated his specific type of personality "not everyone knew how much he suffered because of the shocks that befell his loved ones" [11]. Portnoy representing one of the most conflicted or repressed groups of people try to cure the malady which befalls them. This cure is not an all-encompassing one; however, being artistic and original provides the individual with a good-enough blueprints to manage himself in the almost chaotic milieu of the twentieth century America.

Psychoanalysis is the link which Portnoy clings to first and foremost to save himself from his psychosocial issues. Then, when the unconscious speaks it seems as if there is indeed someone knocking on the other side of the door, so that we are then led to 'the impropriety of trying to turn it [the unconscious] into an inside'. [8]

The crisis Portnoy as a conscientious Jew suffers from is what psychiatric specialist Viktor Frankl, creator of the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, describes as: "a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way - an honorable way - in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment" [12]. His alienation within the society is what torments him most. Portnoy's Complaint becomes a well-balanced talking cure for psychological inconsistencies. As Jeffrey Berman states: "When a Philip Roth character finds himself lying on a couch, more than likely he is engaged not in sex but in psychoanalysis. Therapy becomes the most intimate and imaginative event in life for the beleaguered hero, the one love affair he cannot live without" [1].

Suffering is the sole criteria for judgment. Suffering of course happens in different forms and circumstances. One who has set a goal for themselves and painstakingly strives toward achieving it should never stir away from the direction he is heading. This kind of suffering is what I would call sweet pain which will eventually lead to

some great achievement in the life of people who endure it. Remember that any such form of suffering is permissible and should be overtaken as much as possible in order to reach your dreams and goal. The difference between this form of suffering and any other is the fact that at the end or within the extent of this suffering there are some periods of satisfaction when one can reap what they sow and can actually see the positive results of their hard labor. It is these satisfactory results that actually lead to some kind of compensation for the endured pain and make us willing to undertake greater risks.

### Portnoy's Subconscious Identity

Freud [13] defined these oppositions through a distinction between consciousness and the unconscious. After he established these two separate parts for our intellect he then sets psychoanalysts on a perpetual mission of investigation. Some critics might find some problems, as they have in the past, with this over-implication of the mind into two parts. What Freud actually did was a reification of the conscious and unconscious mind which occurred through his stratification model. In the hands of psychiatrists, particularly those influenced by psychoanalysis, consciousness is treated as a definitive terms which establishes the relationship within civilization, reason and mental health. Truth, which is assumed here to correspond with reality, is then threatened by "what lies outside consciousness, and so to enlarge the domain of the ego is necessarily to drain the reservoirs of irrationality that swirl around under the surface; 'Where id was, there ego shall be. It is the work of culture - not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee'". [13]

Lacanian psychoanalysts face a forced choice between recuperation, the neutralization and absorption of their critical energies into contemporary common sense about the self and steadfast defiance of representations of the self-supposed to be healthy and happy. While 'subversion' of the subject in the clinic does not release us all from alienated labor under capitalism it does enable us to refuse to adapt to the system that entails alienation. The mistake that one may make regarding sexuality is to view it through a sanctimonious and religious lens which will lead to hasty judgments about any given individual. One is a terrible person if he seeks different sexual partners in different periods of their lives and on the other hand the partner who commits himself or herself to the same relationship that was begotten under some customary conditions is the one who is most respectful. In reality nothing regarding sexuality should be prejudged. If any assumption regarding the sexuality of a person should be made it should happen based on the amount of satisfaction, both spiritual and physical, which one



derives from a certain relationship. Love always exists but love is nothing but loyalty and truthfulness toward the one you spiritually or literally owe your life to. A lion for example would be so vulnerable if bullied within its group and not given the opportunity to express its masculinity and its power.

The framework of the novel is unique. Alexander Portnoy is meeting with his therapist (wait a minute, is this the new Gatsby movie?) and basically spilling all the beans about every graphic and detestable thing he's ever done.

He was raised by two, authoritarian Jewish parents. His sexually promiscuous nature is the area that causes the main tension between him and his family. It is often self-directed and exhaustive when they cause conflicts with the morals of his parents. This overwhelms him as a child. In his unconscious he tries to exact a revenge on his parents and their oppressive rules. In his sexual rebellion, he draws a protective layer to defend his inner morals and values against those of the outer world. The unconscious then becomes 'another place', perhaps even inhabited by something that would correspond to self-centered conscious awareness, and to characterize it as 'id' too neatly maps this other place from where we view it, very much like while so unlike us. [13] It's a monologue.

Even as an adult—a successful Insurance Commissioner, his parents hound him to no end. They hound him about getting married, driving convertibles, staying out late, and everything you could ever imagine. Here are a few quotes that describe Portnoy's issues with his parents. A perverted orientation to the law is one that overcomes a normal neurotic conflict with norms, and turns to enjoyment in enactment of the law itself; in this the subject makes himself 'the instrument of the Other's jouissance' [8]

Lacan follows Levi-Strauss in seeing Oedipus as "the site in which nature is transformed into culture, a structural transformation that makes the human subject into a being that operates at the dialectically-mediated interface of the biological and social, neither one nor the other, ambiguously positioned in 'second nature' " [8] Consequently Portnoy being a Jew is bound to face social stigmas brought with it. "A Jewish man with his parents alive is half the time a helpless infant!" [7] This form of reduction, expressed in the class character of psychoanalysis, operates by way of the silent presuppositions that are made about who may and may not access treatment and who may or may not train as analysts.

There is thus a shift to the voice here, voice as object a [14] but in another version the shift is also away from the cut as something that keeps psychoanalysis within a 'phallic' paradigm toward a different way of working with the subject around motifs of 'border linking' and

'metamorphosis' [14] though there are concerns that this slides back from Lacan to some version of object relations [14] "Even in the Chinese restaurant, where the Lord has lifted the ban on pork dishes for the obedient children of Israel, the eating of lobster Cantonese is considered by God (Whose mouthpiece on earth, in matter pertaining to food, is my Mom) to be totally out of the question." [7]

### Portnoy's Effort for a Unique Identity

The series of relations to the analyst as object takes place through signifying operations we call 'transference' [8] So that sets the background for Alex Portnoy. The guy pretty much hates his parents and struggles with his Jewish upbringing.

Instead of seeking the warm embrace of a mother-like figure that can give him the traditional sense of belonging he has been raised to like he chooses to engage with a vulgar woman he casually calls "The Monkey." [7] "Rather than taking this peculiar choice for a female friend as a simple and trivial affair we can go back to his parent to find the stimulus for his strange love-affair. As Frankl points out "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." [12] the space here being the large gap between the American society in which Portnoy is raised and the rules at his home under which he is brought up creates that board on which Portnoy decides to govern with his own rules. For him the Monkey with her wild ways of life and vulgar tastes is the means to connect with that society shunned by his parents. The woman who is in every way a nemesis to the ideal Jewish mother he was raised by, is the bond which keeps his diverted psyche in balance.

Roth's style derives from an entertaining mixture of fun and sarcasm with frequent memorable highlights that easily stick in one's mind. He has an intelligent tone which he maintains throughout the novel. There are some thematic subject matters like his father's constipation which he frequently brings up. "I can lie about my name, I can lie about my school, but how am I going to lie about this [f...ing] nose? "You seem like a very nice person Mr. Porte-Noir, but why do you go around covering the middle of your face like that?" Because suddenly it has taken off, the middle of my face! Because gone is the button of my childhood years, that pretty little thing that people used to look at in my carriage, and lo and behold, the middle of my face has begun to reach out towards God. Porte-Noir and Parsons my ass, kid, you have got J-E-W written right across the middle of your face..." [7]

On the other hand the Portnoy's Complaint is a social study of the American society. As Fanon and Said in their joint essay elaborate "civilization is increasingly radicalized, with motifs of barbarism assuming some

importance as the other of civilized reason such that otherness becomes rendered into something opposed to the realm of the dominant language system as a dimension of the 'symbolic' ". [8] "Yes, the only people in the world whom it seems to me the Jews are not afraid of are the Chinese. Because one, the way they speak English makes my father sound like Lord Chesterfield; two, the insides of their heads are just so much fried rice anyway; and three, to them we are not Jews but white—and maybe even Anglo Saxon. Imagine! No wonder the waiters can't intimidate us. To them we're just some big-nosed variety of WASP! Boy, do we eat. Suddenly even the pig is no threat". [7] Philip-Roth thus pictures the society which is not so appealing to a lot of Jewish people. And it is no surprise that most of them hated this novel when it was released. As is known, it is in the realm of experience inaugurated by psychoanalysis that we may grasp along what imaginary lines the human organism, in the most intimate recesses of its being, manifests its capture in a symbolic dimension.

The language and conceptual structure of the psychoanalytical process profoundly informed, shaped and influenced these narratives so deeply steeped—albeit at times veiled and buried—in psychoanalytical themes, undertones and resonances. [15]

Roth often expresses skepticism concerning the relationship people have with their respective country and system of government. He particularly admits: "We must admit that we are ignorant of our respective countries. Incredibly ignorant". [16] These subjects although primarily comedic tend to highlight the contrasts between Portnoy's inner and psychological world and the one the people around him are living. Such a contrast serves to solidify Portnoy's predisposition for isolation from his immediate environment. This seclusion and inclusion within him has served to make him the independent character we find at the end where he confesses "from the settling of scores! The pursuit of dreams! From this hopeless, senseless loyalty to the long ago!" [7] He keeps up his struggle for a separate identity from the ones he has been traditionally identified with and this constant struggle is what forms his freedom and his heroic charm.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

While reading any psychoanalytical text we are apt to quickly run into the words "obsession" and "psychosis", and we have to go only a few steps further to find the term sexuality. These terms, as it happens are not very rare in the works of fiction. In fact, as Lacan believes. A large part of Portnoy hovers around the archetypal bildungsroman of an artistic mind with the bloom of his age come to terms with his own sexuality and then utilizing his self-discovered powers become his own Man.

One can survive either through a complete metamorphosis into a tool for the accomplishment of the goals of a system of which he is a cause or, not being satisfied with being a mere tool plan an escape. Escape plans as it happens all require a certain amount of elaboration., one more than the others, Most of the times survival equals the sexual prevalence of the species over its peers. Sexuality unfortunately or not overshadows everything that coincides with life, economic and political power, respect of peers, siblings, mates and even children largely depends on how well you are doing in your sexual life. In the *Portnoy's Complaint* we find the author, Philip Roth, give an unadulterated voice to the suppressed sexuality of a teenager, Portnoy. By taking us methodically and unaffectedly through every stage of his physical and sexual development, Roth manages to capture a picture of human life which, in the showy and affected modern life style which so many of us seem to lead, goes unnoticed. In this study, using mainly the psychoanalytical views of Jacques Lacan, sexuality regardless of its moral issues, is an important factor in shaping the young adult's personality. Portnoy seems to be going through a lot of sexual issues that we know have something to do with the suppressive milieu to which he belongs which a traditional Jewish worldview is defining him as an archetypal Jew who is shunned by the society and marginalized by the unfriendly and the suppressive majority. Regardless of the historical situation and which he might have been born in Portnoy as a self-conscious child who tries to identify himself with the philosophic ideal of liberalism decides to form his own rebellion against his parents which work as the levers of the society to impose on whatever rule which his rebellious nature finds abhorring and unbearable. Portnoy stands for the typical teenager who regardless of any adult centered religious, political, or socio-economic bias finds himself a human first. He finding the general propaganda hagiographic propaganda of his environment consciously decides to stand for what he things to be right. Although a sexual rebellion with its main tool being, masturbation is the best weaponry he manages to come up. By forming such a protest he manages to faze himself out of that formative period of his life somehow unaffected and become a person with distinctive characteristics from that of his parents. A rebel with a cause Portnoy rather than becoming a tool in the hands of his oppressive and dogmatic society becomes an artist who is independent and well-versed in a world whose rules he consciously defines and understands.

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